



TOWARD STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Brigadier General Mari K. Eder, U.S. Army

Communicating strategically during a war on global terrorism should be an urgent part of the mission of every arm of the U.S. Government. Explaining our government's actions and policies to the peoples of the world must be a top priority.

—U.S. Department of State¹

A NUMBER OF ARTICLES in the press this past year have reported that political and military leaders are frustrated because the government does not have an integrated process for delivering “strategic communication” on issues of national importance, particularly the War on Terrorism. Frustration over the inability to coordinate and synchronize public information activities has been vented toward the Department of Defense (DOD) and the military services. Others have voiced similar worries about a lack of cohesiveness and coordination within the Department of State and the National Security Council. In short, the question of how to transform public communication channels and methods to meet the challenges posed in an era of globalized, instantaneous, and ubiquitous media has caused concern and even alarm. Moreover, many, especially in the military, are worried that our enemies have already occupied and dominated the infosphere battlespace.

Army doctrine has evolved greatly over the last three years to deal with this challenge. It acknowledges that the information domain truly is a battlespace and that acquisition of favorable media coverage supporting regional and national political objectives should be equated with seizing a form of key terrain. This view is reflected, for example, in Chapter 1 of the recently published FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, which states, “The information environment is a critical dimension of such internal wars and insurgents attempt to shape it to their advantage.”² The FM clearly recognizes that counterinsurgent operations must be equally sophisticated, flexible, and cognizant of the power of shaping information strategies.

Against such a background then, let us ask, What is strategic communication? And how does it differ from the traditional means the government has used to inform the public?

For many, distinguishing between strategic communication and other, more familiar, forms of public communication is either mysterious or problematic or both. For some, determining what constitutes strategic communication calls to mind a comment by Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, in the early days of World War II: “I don’t know what the hell this ‘logistics’ is that Marshall [Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall] is always talking

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PHOTO: Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates and commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral Timothy J. Keating, answer reporters' questions during a press conference at Headquarters, U.S. Pacific Command, 31 May 2007. (U.S. Navy, Specialist 3d Class Elisia V. Gonzales)

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about, but I want some of it.”³ Many feel precisely the same about strategic communication. Although they do not know what strategic communication is or how it works, they recognize that it is new and somehow more effective than older forms of public communication—and is therefore important. One result of this situation is that the expression *strategic communication* is one of the most misused and misunderstood terms in the military lexicon.

The purpose of this article is to clarify the concept of strategic communication so that commanders at all levels can understand and exploit its benefits.

Why Strategic Communication Is Important

The principal benefit of strategic communication derives essentially from the principle of war called *mass*. Strategic communication means massing information among all agents of public information at a critical time and place to accomplish a specific objective. It avoids the destructive effects of mixed messages that result from not massing information. Dribbling out mixed, unsynchronized information instead of massing the release of unequivocal messages backed by a substantial body of facts is especially destructive during times of crisis, or when the government and military find themselves under enormous public or political pressure, fastidious public scrutiny, and emotional criticism.

Many think the U.S. Government habitually sends out mixed messages on issues of vital concern, messages in which policy is not clearly and consistently articulated or no clear justification for policy is provided. Such messages undermine confidence in U.S. policy by conveying the perception of disarray, vacillation, and weakness in the national will to any nation seeking to understand U.S. intentions. This frustrates our allies, confuses potential friends, and encourages our enemies.

Our government’s view concerning the recent Supreme Court ruling on tribunals is a case in point. The administration failed to provide a unified response to the court’s ruling that military tribunals are illegal. Since the administrative branch (including the departments of State, Justice, and Defense) could not or did not decide what unified message to promulgate regarding the ruling’s significance to the war effort, widely different media interpretations abounded and went unchecked by a government

public information counterpart. BBC News bluntly termed the ruling a “stunning rebuff to President Bush,” and the French press generally followed a similar theme of “Supreme Court disavows Bush.” German national radio hailed the ruling as a “Victory for the Rule of Law.” Civilian news media from Spain to Italy, Pakistan, and China agreed, while the Swedish newspaper *Sydsvenskan*’s editorial writer commented, “Now the judicial power has put a check on the executive power. Thanks for that.”⁴ In contrast, the Arab press reaction was skeptical. Writing in London’s *Al-Hayat* Arabic newspaper, columnist Jihad al-Khazin commented, “This was all great news, so great that it was reported by all American and international media outlets and continues to draw reactions until this very day, but none of it is true, or, if we wish to be accurate, will ever see the light of day, because on the same day that the Bush Administration declared its commitment to the Supreme Court’s ruling, the Senate Judiciary Committee was holding hearings on the treatment of accused terrorists.”⁵

How to Avoid Mixed Messages

We can describe the agenda-setting function of America’s free press in the same terms the U.S. Army War College uses to define strategic leadership: *telling people what to think about* instead of *telling them what to think*. Strategic communication is an essential, complementary activity to strategic leadership that manages public discourse not by attempting to tell people what to think, but by channeling information into the public information arena in an effective way. It sets the national agenda by establishing as a public priority *what the public chooses to think about*.

Strategic Communication Defined

To fully exploit strategic communication’s potential to help people select what to think about, we must first distinguish it from other forms of public information and outreach programs. Doing so will help us define strategic communication, a necessary step to developing the rigorous training and education program leaders will need to enable them to focus on keeping issues of importance and the strategic messages concerning them prominently positioned in the national agenda.

Four major characteristics distinguish strategic communication from other types of public information:

- *Audience selection.* Strategic communication differs from other public information activities in that greater care is exercised in the selection of audiences in order to achieve specific purposes. This stands in contrast to traditional public affairs and public diplomacy, whose activities have been historically stovepiped—public affairs to U.S. domestic audiences, public diplomacy to foreign audiences. Moreover, most public information activities aim at broad public audiences. The Armed Forces Information Service, for example, targets the entire military community and the even broader general domestic audience interested in military affairs.

The first half of the definition of strategic communication set forth in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Strategic Communication Execution Roadmap particularly emphasizes the importance of audience selection: “*Focused United States Government processes and efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen or preserve conditions favorable to advance national interests and policies* through the use of coordinated information, themes, plans, programs and actions integrated with other elements of national power” (italics mine).⁶

- *Breaking down stovepipes.* The QDR roadmap definition also highlights the fact that strategic communication has a broader application than military public affairs. It calls attention to the need for formal mechanisms to compel a culture of cooperation among public information activities. In the past, public affairs, legislative affairs, outreach programs (academic, interest group, think tanks), and State Department public diplomacy essentially operated independently, within their own stovepipes, to reach different, discrete audiences. Consequently, they sometimes addressed the same issues of public concern with contradictory messages and talking points.

The characteristic that distinguishes strategic communication from the old stovepiped way of doing business is formal cooperation among communicators. Strategic communication mandates that all public information agents in the government’s business—even coalition partners—must work together.

What distinguishes strategic communication from public information is a formal methodology that deconflicts messages through careful delibera-

tion and coordination, analyzes and prioritizes key audiences, and synchronizes and times the release of information by all public information agents to their respective audiences in a disciplined fashion.

Strategic communication also offers an opportunity to foster a true culture of engagement across the Army. In turn, such a viable, active culture will drive and support the development of strategic communication as a force multiplier.

- *Public diplomacy in strategic communication.* Under-Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes has identified the objectives of closer coordination and integration among various government agencies dealing with public information, and greater emphasis on developing cross-cultural capabilities. The State Department’s public diplomacy effort is transforming the way the department does business.

Advocating increased funding for programs that are working, Hughes has mentioned international exchange programs, a direct form of community outreach (albeit on a global scale). She noted, “People who come here see America, make up their own minds about us and almost always go home with a different and much more positive view of our country.”⁷

Another welcome change is that the State Department’s emerging public communication strategy acknowledges the speed of global communications. The department has set up a new rapid response center based on the successful model used by Defense Public Affairs during the kinetic phases of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The center monitors daily communications worldwide and provides a summary, along with America’s response, to diplomatic outposts. This information enables U.S. Government representatives to be more knowledgeable and responsive U.S. policy advocates. The establishment of regional hubs to position spokespersons in key media centers like Dubai ensures even greater presence and reach to key audiences in the Arab world.

The department has also given senior regional representatives such as ambassadors and foreign service officers greater freedom to reach out to foreign audiences, both directly and through the civilian news media.

And finally, the department has placed greater emphasis on using public diplomacy to shape

policy. Noting that America hasn't always adjusted its programs to make their benefits clear to average people, Hughes said the president "instructed [the department] to look at ways to make programs more effective, to set clearer goals, focus programs, partner with the private sector . . . then make sure we communicate what we are doing—a perfect example of the intersection of public diplomacy and policy."⁸

• *Rapid, comprehensive responses.* The fourth element that distinguishes strategic communication from the traditional stovepiped operations that dominate much of the government's public information system is a rapid response that employs a range of communication tools in a synchronized, comprehensive way.

Strategic communication by its very name implies execution in support of a strategy, which, in turn, implies reaching specific strategic objectives. To compete in a global conflict in which lurid visual images and political messages often drive the agenda in compressed windows of opportunity, our strategic communication must be at least as efficient and speedy as our adversaries'. To this end, we are relearning daily that "being the firstest, with the mostest" in terms of initiative is just as applicable in the infosphere as on the battlefield.

Addressing this need in a speech last year to the Council on Foreign Relations, then secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld commented on the Defense Department's view of the way ahead:

Government public affairs and public diplomacy efforts must reorient staffing, schedules and culture to engage the full range of media that are having such an impact today.

Our U.S. Central Command, for example, has launched an online communications effort that includes electronic news updates and a links campaign that has resulted in several hundred blogs receiving and publishing CENTCOM content.

The U.S. Government will have to develop the institutional capability to anticipate and act within the same news cycle. That will require instituting 24-hour press operation centers, elevating internet operations and other channels of communications to the equal status of traditional 20th century press relations. It will result in much less reliance on the traditional print press, just as the publics of the U.S. and the world are relying less on newspapers as their principal source of information.

And it will require attracting more experts in these areas from the private sector to government service. We need to consider the possibility of new organizations and programs that can serve a similarly valuable role in the War on Terror in this new century. There is no guidebook—no roadmap—to tell our hardworking folks what to do to meet these new challenges.⁹

Defense Department efforts to improve public affairs to support the new imperatives of strategic communication began in 2004 during a "tank brief" on public affairs to the service chiefs of staff. That session was the result of a continuing debate centering on commanders' frustration with an ill-defined and little-understood communications process. Following the brief, DOD began to grow a strategic communication capability and structure, one supported by the findings of the QDR. Recognizing the importance of applying strategy to communication, DOD created the position of deputy assistant secretary of defense (joint communication) (DASD[JC]) in December 2005 to "shape DOD-wide processes, policy, doctrine, organization and training of the primary communication-supporting capabilities of the Department. These include public affairs, defense support for public diplomacy, visual information, and information operations including psychological operations."¹⁰ The terms of reference for the position state that it exists to maximize DOD's capability to communicate in an aggressive, synchronized manner. The position clearly represents the first formal recognition of the need for a military communication advocate at the highest level.

One of the new DASD(JC)'s primary tasks was to improve all aspects of strategic communication by driving communications transformation in DOD and implementing decisions from the 2006 QDR. To this end, a DASD(JC) working group developed a roadmap to provide strategic direction, objectives, milestones, and metrics for success. Just as importantly, the roadmap identified program and budget implications of strategic communication initiatives.¹¹ The roadmap seeks to achieve three overarching objectives:

• Define roles and develop strategic communication doctrine for the primary communication-supporting capabilities: public affairs, information operations, military diplomacy, and defense support to public diplomacy.

- Resource, organize, train, and equip DOD's primary communication support capabilities.
- Institutionalize a DOD process in which strategic communication is incorporated in the development of strategic policy, planning, and execution.

Furthermore, to address the fundamental requirement for strategic communication to be joint as well as interdepartmental and interagency, DOD initiated new requirements for joint public affairs officers. Despite a clear need in joint, combined, and expeditionary operations for public affairs entities that have trained and worked together, there has never been a validated joint requirement for public affairs; consequently, there was no capacity. This omission laid the groundwork for failure in communicating operations that developed rapidly and in an environment more global and information-oriented than anyone had anticipated—what commanders subsequently came to expect and want had not previously been explored or described in any detailed fashion. As a result, the services were left to estimate, using their own doctrine, what they might need ad hoc. Given the situation, it should have been no surprise—though many were surprised—that capabilities did not match demands or expectations.

In addition to establishing the DASD(JC), DOD assigned formal responsibility for communication proponency by establishing a joint structure called the Joint Forces Command-based Joint Public Affairs Support Element (JPASE). The JPASE exists to support the integration of communications into warfighter training; to develop operational public communication doctrine, programs, and policies for the warfighter; and to give the combatant commander a rapidly deployable military public affairs capability at the beginning of an operation, when public communication is most critical and has the potential to be most effective.

The rapid and early deployment of a public affairs team in support of earthquake relief efforts in Pakistan was an early JPASE success. Within three days of the earthquake, the joint force commander had a team of operationally focused, culturally astute, professional communicators on the ground. Their presence gave the commander the ability to shape the information environment from the beginning of the operation, ensuring that actions and information fully supported U.S. intent and goals. The team's ability to tell and amplify the global story

of America's humanitarian efforts achieved the distinctly measurable effect of fostering greater understanding and more favorable views of the U.S. by international audiences.

Even as the QDR addressed the need to implement a culture of strategic communication within the DOD via the strategic communication execution roadmap, the services were beginning to make sense of a broadly but poorly defined and often little understood concept.

Working Together

The Army began to develop a strategic communication process in 2004 by establishing a strategic communication team in the Office of the Director of the Army Staff. The team's charter required it to link communications to Army strategy and priority programs, but it took nearly two years to mature the effort to the "walk" level of the "crawl, walk, run" paradigm. In April 2005, responsibility for all Army strategic communication planning and the attendant staffing and funding for contract support was transferred to the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs (OCPA). Using an enterprise approach to communications across the Army, OCPA began to develop strategic communication planning processes by building collaborative relationships with Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) strategists, subject-matter experts, and other communicators. This created the structure, culture, and focus to support development of Army strategic communication.

Another driving force was Army senior-leader focus on developing a strategic communication capability. One of HQDA's objectives was to enhance strategic communication. With staff responsibility clearly in the Army Public Affairs portfolio, the objective was to "improve, over time, the strategic approach to Army communication, as well as the framework, mechanisms, customs, capabilities, and products needed for channeling the communicative energy of the entire Army." Army communications serve as the focal point for integrating "all Army efforts interfacing with a global public and should strive to be a 'best practices' benchmark for government, military and corporate communication." Everyone in OCPA involved in this effort has understood that "innovating communication within the Army Headquarters, and across the Army, demands a change in organization

to create an enterprise approach to communication that better reflects the Army's current vision, mission, plan, and four overarching and interrelated strategies." The Army identified five lines of effort to drive this project forward: in-process, structure, culture, image enhancement, and capabilities.¹² The Strategic Communication Coordination Group moved to develop plans and products such as the "Army Communications Guide" that enhanced a variety of audiences' understanding of significant Army themes, messages, campaigns, and events.

Senior staff support for applying strategy to communications and accepting collaborative planning processes in designing major communications campaigns is growing. Making Public Affairs the Army proponent for strategic communication is serving as a sense-making device, a construct that allows us to make sense of a new idea.

The Department of the Army has nested strategic communication planning and processes in the Army's strategy for transformation and solidly

linked strategic communication to the national military strategy (Figure 1). This is significant. By beginning the hard, detailed, day-to-day work of establishing coordination and development-design processes for communication planning first at HQDA, and in the next year throughout subordinate commands, the Army has taken the initial difficult steps to build an understanding of what strategic communication is and how strategic communication planning can work.

These efforts have already paid dividends by linking communications to the Army's long-term programs and processes supporting transformation (Figure 2). As national concepts for strategic communication planning mature and DOD implementation of strategic communication processes evolves, the Army is ready to support and complement those efforts.

The Army is leading the effort to implement strategic communication throughout DOD. The coordination group process and collaborative decision-making efforts that produced solid products

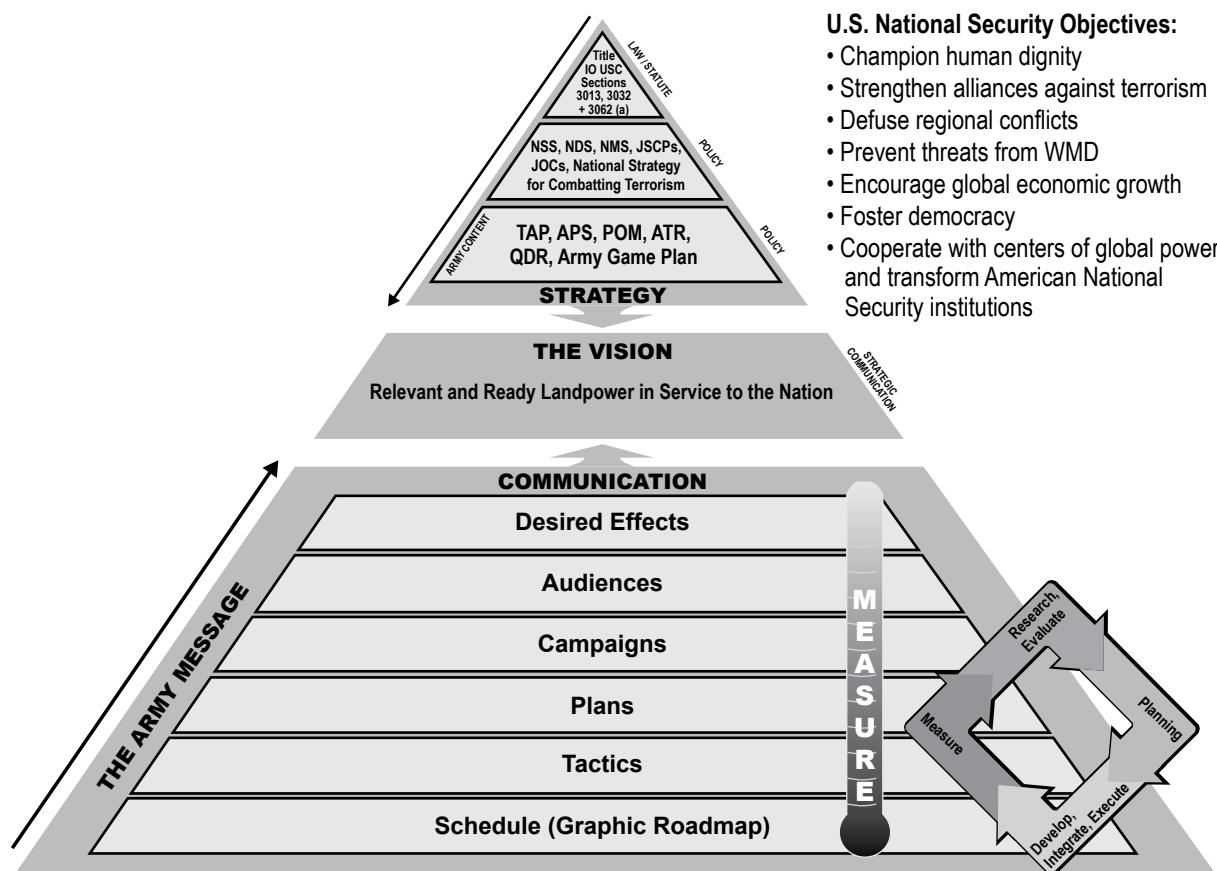


Figure 1. Army transformation and strategic communication.

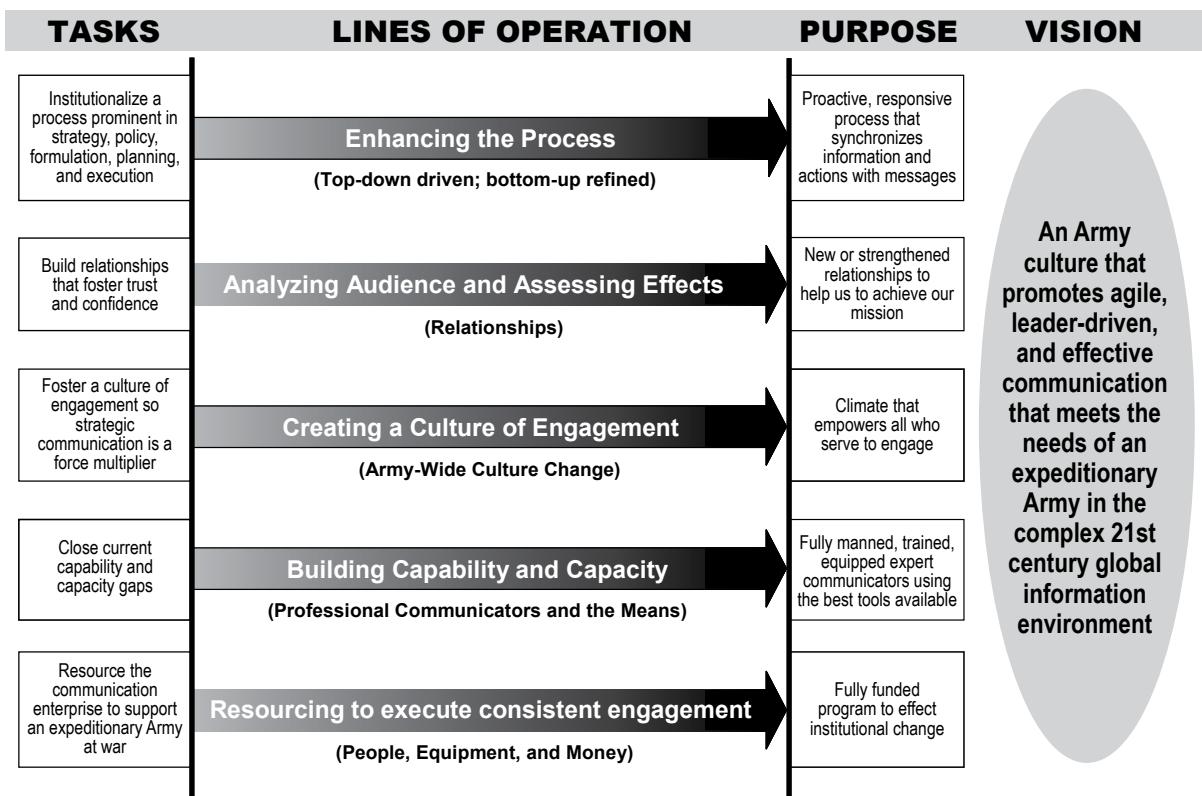


Figure 2. Strategic communication concept of operations.

have caused other organizations and activities to take a direct interest in the Army's progress. Members of OCPA's plans division have briefed the Army's process to the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, members of the Joint Staff, and the other services' communications leaders. While other activities may choose to adopt some or all of the Army's best practices, the Army is undoubtedly leading DOD's strategic communication effort forward. Even so, transforming to this new way of doing business across the Army will require significant, sustained investment in training and education at all levels in the future. Finally, for strategic communication to be successful, the Army must move the strategic communication concept of operations forward by fully resourcing the communications enterprise to support an expeditionary Army at war.

Building Strategic Communicators

More than 20 years ago, (former) Army Chief of Public Affairs Major General Patrick Brady said, "Clausewitz may not have listed information as a principle of war, but today it is, whether we like it

or not. There will be trouble if we ignore the need to inform our people and to deal with the commercial media in the planning, practice and execution of war. There is not enough training on public information in the military educational system. We are working on this issue."¹³

In some ways, it appears that not much has changed since Brady made those remarks. Some individual tasks have been added to Army officer and NCO training courses; some courses remain unchanged. On the enlisted side, Army Basic Combat Training (BCT) first included a communications task in 2001. The Army Public Affairs Center introduced this lesson to the BCT curriculum just after 9/11 and updated it in March 2005 when it added a lesson plan, "Interact with News Media."¹⁴ There is no public affairs or communications training in the Warrior Leader Course or in either the Basic or Advanced Noncommissioned Officer Courses. The first substantive training for NCOs occurs at the Sergeants Major Academy with a two-hour overview of Army public affairs followed by a capstone command post exercise in which senior NCOs participate in a media interview.

In the officer education system, the Basic Officer Leadership Course incorporates two hours of conference and discussion to train the task “Participate in a Media Interview.” A short practical exercise follows. TRADOC mandates two hours of media awareness training in all captains career courses. This training focuses on company commanders and battalion staff officers supporting media operations in their area of responsibility. The intermediate-level education course at Fort Leavenworth includes a two-hour overview of Army public affairs transformation to support current operations. Junior majors attend this year-long career course to prepare them for senior command and staff positions.

For years, the Army’s senior service college, the Army War College (AWC), held a “media day” for its resident students. The day consisted of panel discussions by members of the civilian news media, and officers were encouraged to bring their wives. It was a day of grand entertainment conducted by media celebrities and did little to further any understanding or acceptance of a commander’s responsibility to communicate or the necessity to plan for communications as a critical element of military operations. The Freedom Forum’s 1995 report on the relationship between the media and the military, *America’s Team: ‘The Odd Couple,’* scoffed at the educational value of these “media days” and recommended scrapping them. In the past few years, the AWC has, but it has not added any meaningful communications component to the core curriculum in their place. The current core curriculum does, however, contain seminar discussions and exercises about the role of the media in the strategic environment. The AWC has also incorporated communications issues into multiple elective courses, and it exercises the student’s abilities to conduct communications planning and media engagement in the course’s capstone exercise.

Public affairs has always been closely identified with media relations, because that is exactly what the Army teaches Soldiers, NCOs, and officers in Army courses. But we teach nothing about internal communications, the importance of outreach in communicating with the American people, and the need for public affairs planning in operations; and of course, there is very little about the significance of applying strategy to communications or how to do it.

“The challenge is to train the force not what to think but how to think,” Army Colonel Peter Mansoor

said in a recent interview with *The Boston Globe*. Mansoor, who led the Army and Marine Counterinsurgency Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, went on to say that troops must get inside the minds of both the insurgents and the citizenry. “Counterinsurgency,” he claimed, “is a thinking soldier’s war. It is graduate-level stuff. There is public relations, civil affairs, information operations. It is not easy.”¹⁵

Training and education, particularly in strategic communication, must be addressed across the force for strategic communication to succeed as an operational capability and for it to support DOD objectives in winning the battle of ideas. The Defense Information School is changing its curriculum to address the need for increased training in strategic communication, and Army Public Affairs has proposed that the Senior Leader Development Office consider strategic communication training for colonels in its evolving professional development program.

The Public Affairs Officer

The aforementioned report on media-military relations, *America’s Team: ‘The Odd Couple,’* was an extensive study that proposed detailed, exacting recommendations. It recognized the need for strategic public affairs leadership at the unified command level, stating, “In major conflicts such as Desert Storm, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff should consider assigning an officer of flag or general rank in the combat theater to coordinate the news media aspects of the operation under the commander of U.S. military forces.”¹⁶ This occurred at U.S. Central Command in the early days of Operation Iraqi Freedom. As operations in the Central Command theater began to generate velocity on the international stage, it became apparent that the public affairs colonel did not have the staff muscle to serve the command at that required level. Rear Admiral Craig Quigley, a career public affairs officer, was then detailed from OSD Public Affairs to Central Command to serve as the director of public affairs. When Quigley retired, Jim Wilkinson, a White House appointee with general/flag officer-commensurate rank, was assigned to take his place. After Wilkinson left at the conclusion of major ground combat operations, Central Command looked for a civilian of his stature, experience, and connections. That search was unsuccessful, and the Central Command public

affairs effort slowly began to revert to its pre-war configuration and capability.

By the summer of 2004, Central Command's public affairs staff had changed drastically, from a staff of 70 headed by a general officer or civilian equivalent, to a staff of barely 10. The office remained functional despite having to split operations between Tampa and Qatar; however, such a small staff was unable to deal with the tempo of communications requirements, nationally and internationally, that had increased since the end of the conflict. This was not due to a lack of proficiency on the part of the staff; rather, it was a direct result of the immense, continuing demands of the global information environment.

Information operations, as a communications capability, began to expand to fill that void, although later the overlap in mission sets was largely resolved with an expanded staff in the Public Affairs Office. Public Affairs generated a strategic communication approach for reaching American, allied, and Iraqi audiences and initiated an aggressive communications outreach focus.

Since then, Central Command's public affairs operation has made significant strides, from responding rapidly to negative media pieces, to establishing a satellite office in Dubai's media city, to creating a team to monitor and respond to commentary in the blogosphere. Public affairs professionals from all services have been responsible for tremendous innovation.

The Army public affairs officer is grounded in the operational Army by initial service as a Soldier, leader, commander, and staff officer. Once entering the communications career field, this pentathlete can provide a broad range of communications capabilities to a commander. Public affairs officers typically manage portfolios that span the full spectrum of information delivery, from internal product development, to staff participation in the military decision-making process, to outreach innovation, legislative liaison, crisis communications, speech-writing, communications operations, and strategic communication planning.

Army public affairs officers are leaders, spokespersons, Army champions, cultural translators, force advocates, strategic communication planners, independent thinkers, and operational decision-makers. Future plans are to broaden their experience base

to ensure they are agile, flexible, culturally aware, sophisticated with emerging communications technologies, and savvy in dealing with all types of media. In addition, the notion of broadening career experiences for all Army officers is expanding through the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, multinational opportunities program. An officer with this broad skill set can also pursue opportunities in recruiting or marketing, or as a legislative liaison, strategist, scholar, or interagency fellow.

The Army recognizes that its communications officers need to be more broadly capable, culturally aware, and able to operate in volatile, uncertain, and stressful information environments. Those who choose the public affairs career field must understand this reality. Following DOD's lead, Army Public Affairs proponency is reviewing career paths, training, and education for all its public affairs officers. For example, advanced degree opportunities are much broader. They now include such disciplines as mass communications, strategic communication, diplomacy, international relations, and public administration.

Vision

Strategic communication as a concept is logical and ripe for development. We can build a solid, meaningful, and responsive national capability to communicate policy around such a concept. At the national level, our greatest asset is the recognition that from the seat of government, we must tie communications to national strategy and policy. Strategic communication is evolving as a process. It was of necessity born in collaboration and integrated into every operation emanating from the national security strategy of the United States. Within the executive branch of government, we must be able to communicate consistently and clearly with America's allies and foes and with international audiences across the world stage. We must remove the haze of suspicion born of mixed, changing, or incomplete messages.

In DOD, our most promising efforts are the evolving QDR roadmap and ongoing efforts to organize, equip, train, and support change in the communications field while educating the force about the broad range of capabilities this joint field can offer the joint commander. Strategic communication is not public affairs, but what it brings to public affairs is the strategic tie, focus, and structure.

In the Army, the advent of strategic communication represents the resurrection of a small, historically marginalized career field providing both challenge and opportunity for sophisticated career communications professionals. The door is open for these pentathletes to fulfill the need for strategic communication planning, to teach awareness and broaden the communications capabilities across the Army, and to provide strong communications support to the warfighter at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. This is the potential for strategic communication: to offer insight and understanding about how to apply information as a formidable element of national power.

The term *strategic communication* acknowledges the need to create communications with forethought, insight, and ties to national strategy and U.S. Government policy objectives. It is logical that career public affairs officers who have the training, experience, capabilities, and potential to make it successful should lead it.

Former Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense Larry DiRita said the headache of transformation is worth it. Said DiRita, "The old-fashioned idea that you develop the policy and then pitch it over the transom to the communicator is over. You're continually thinking about communication throughout the course of the policy development process."¹⁷

Contrary to the view of some, strategic communication can be mastered operationally, its effectiveness can be measured, and it is distinctly different from other, more limited forms of public communication. However, one consequence of the priority strategic communication places on working together, not separately, to manage the release of public information has been culture shock in both the government and the media. This shock has led to many emotional arguments about whether such coordinated communication has converted government information provided as a public service into propaganda meant to manipulate not just our adversaries' perceptions, but our own people's as well.

In a purely academic sense, providers of public information and purveyors of propaganda use similar if not identical communication tools (personal outreach, print media, electronic media, and computer communications). However, we must acknowledge that the government has a vital interest in political advocacy during a global conflict, and that global-

ization has changed the rules of public information dissemination. In an environment in which information travels instantaneously across national borders, when does simple prose aimed at providing public information become propaganda? Many question the legality of disseminating information to foreign audiences that clearly advocates on behalf of U.S. Government policy positions when the same information ends up in American media channels, but such objections are unrealistic because all language inescapably both informs and influences.

The domestic media and other wary elements of the U.S. population fear that the coordinated use of powerful instruments of public communication and language will result in political domination through manipulation of the populace. This is not an unwarranted concern. Consequently, the formulation of definitions that describe and differentiate types of communication, some of which could potentially be unethical, goes to the heart of the morals and ethics that underpin our constitution and democratic values—with direct implications for the information system the government uses to inform the U.S. public and the world. As the strategic communication process evolves and matures within the military and the U.S. Government, such serious concerns will continue to surface. Unfortunately, there is no easy resolution in sight. **MR**

NOTES

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